

AWAY WITH THE WIND

THE WAY OF A SHIP, by Alan Villiers;
 Hodder and Stoughton, English price 30/-.

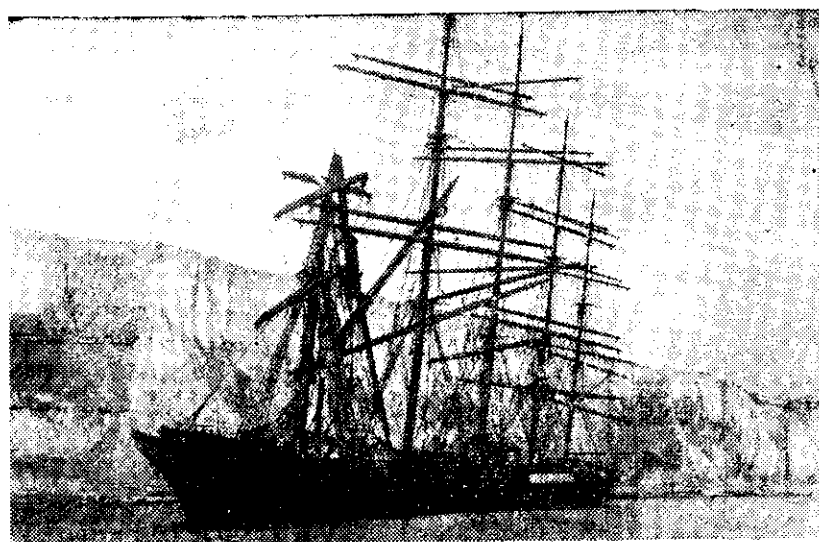
(Reviewed by A.M.)

IT is a commonplace that literary publicity for the deep-sea sailing ship has increased with her doom and death. The advantage of our standpoint is that we can view the whole rise and decline of the big ship in perspective, see clearly her glory and what has driven her away with the wind, and compose her epitaph. Probably no one but Alan Villiers, with his experience in sail and authorship and photography, could have written and illustrated this masterly book. It is a history of the sailing ship. It tells how eastern and western man learned to find his ocean way, and how sail came to its zenith and fought its losing battle, human and economic, with steam. Further, it instructs the landsman in the equipment and working of a ship. As Alan Villiers says, the difficulty with so many books on sail is that they assume knowledge in the reader. He assumes nothing. Every sail, spar and rope is set forth and explained, with the help of drawings that range from full rig to details. The reader

voyages from South Australia round the Horn to England, and is shown the handling of the ship in various stages from anchorage to anchorage. The photographs are superb.

Alan Villiers gives full credit to British ships for fast individual runs, but awards first prize for sustained speed and regularity to the big German ships in the Chilean nitrate trade. There are appendices giving details of record voyages under the British, American and German flags. Perfectly organised from ship and complement to discharge of cargo and loading in Chile, where not an hour was lost while other ships waited on the port's pleasure, the German service ran round the Horn and back with much of the regularity of steam. Over nearly 20 years, Robert Hilgendorf, one of the finest captains who ever lived, averaged seven and a half knots. This German effort culminated in the five-masted, full-rigged ship *Preussen*, of 5080 tons gross, "the greatest sailing ship the world has seen."

Alan Villiers considers the *Preussen* could and should have founded a new sailing dynasty, but to the advantages of steam was added the short-sightedness and conservatism of sail owners and masters. Even now he thinks sail



AGROUND AT DOVER

Turnbull Library Archives

The wreck of the *Preussen*, "the greatest sailing ship the world has seen"

may possibly have a commercial future. Sail is still used for training, and he believes in it. As late as 1953, the commanders of the great Cunarders had been apprentices in sail.

As befits a writer who named his ship after Joseph Conrad, Alan Villiers packs his record with human interest, from

foc'sie to poop. We are told how the sailor lived forward, and what he thought of his job. In a satisfactory ship, well run, his was a contented life, indeed, a happy one, because it was communal and he practised a skilled craft. He despised the man in steam as a mere chipper and painter. And

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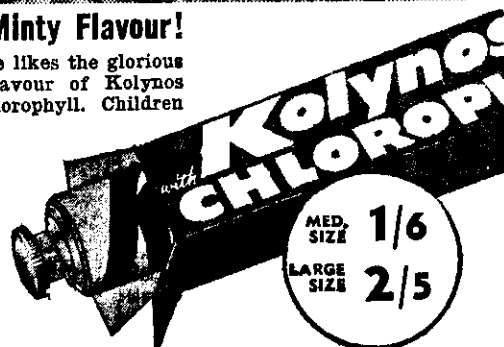
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